

European Astronomy Gets New Vision

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A new vision for radio astronomy is bringing together all 20 of Europe's leading radioastronomy institutes. They plan to build on existing collaboration and significantly enhance the quality and quantity of science currently produced by European astronomers.

RadioNet will create an integrated radio astronomy network providing European scientists with access to world-class facilities along with a research and development plan aimed at supporting and enhancing these facilities. This has been made possible with the help of a grant of 12.4 million euros from the Research Infrastructures action of the EU's Sixth Framework Programme (FP6).

The project also hopes to develop a networking series with the aim of ensuring close collaboration in engineering, software, user support and science; and the training of next generation users - both astronomers and engineers. "RadioNet is enabling the European radio astronomy institutes to work closer together than ever before, in science, in technology and in planning for the future", says Professor Philip Diamond, the project co-ordinator at the University of Manchester's Jodrell Bank Observatory. "We have never all been within a single organisation before and are finding that the levels of communication, efficiency and coordination have already increased to the benefit of all our users'. "Astronomers will quickly see the benefits of this in the shape of greater access to those telescopes that they may not be familiar with, in improvements to the instrumentation of these telescopes and in a more coherent approach to future challenges."

Peter Fletcher, FP6UK's National Contact Point for Research Infrastructures, believes this is a perfect example of the type of project eligible for FP6 funding, saying: "RadioNet was rated first amongst all astronomy proposals in the first group of projects under FP6. A grant of 12.4 million euros over five years greatly strengthens European radioastronomy building on national centres of expertise like Jodrell Bank."

"There is further good news for the radioastronomers from the recent call for Design Studies within the Research Infrastructures action. The Square Kilometre Array Design Study (SKADS) has received a ranking which means that it can expect to receive a contribution from the Commission subject to contract negotiations."

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